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Lost world of the nearby: Minimal ethics on Govan Graving Docks

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Abstract

This article considers what it means to do engaged GeoHumanities research on a fated landscape. The focus falls on a rewilded ruined landscape in the city of Glasgow, Govan Graving Docks, a significant cultural landscape that now faces contested commercial redevelopment. The article describes a repertoire of salvage-research practices that were staged on the docks between 2013 and 2014, first, to better understand the communities, ecologies and enduring bonds that stood to lose out to the redevelopment, and second, to make real differences on the ground during a period of environmental volatility and uncertainty. These practices were emergent, urgent, collaborative and public-facing, and strongly influenced by Zylinska's 'minimal ethics for the Anthropocene' which identifies modes of working for contexts in which life is under threat. By identifying the particular challenges that the fated landscape presents to the invested researcher, and the methodological resources that are available to sustain research in contexts of destruction and uncertainty, this article seeks to extend GeoHumanities capacities to respond to the dispossessions, extinctions and alienations wrought by the Anthropocene, with a proposal for a creative pragmatics, that can be put to work in instances of local environmental change.

Keywords: *Fated landscape, uncertainty, minimal ethics, critical vitalism, crafting methods.*

Unseasonal rituals

'We are gathered here today to mark a pivotal moment in the life of this landscape.' I was standing on a tree stump as I piped my address to a sombre congregation gathered on Govan Graving Docks on the evening of Sunday 30st March, 2014. 'Tomorrow the workmen arrive with their lobbers and chainsaws, bringing three decades of perennial growth, creativity, and companionship to an end here'. In the audience there were local residents, as well as botanists, birders, artists, geographers, local historians, entomologists, urban explorers and community workers. This derelict ship repair and fitting facility was in the ownership of a private property developer now, and tomorrow clearance works would begin to draw it 'back from the brink'. Since the Graving Docks' abandonment in 1988, a distinctive urban ecology had taken root, the River Clyde had infiltrated the dry docks, and opportunist publics moved in. The clearance works would allow the developer to prepare for site-survey, and feasibility studies, in anticipation of a new urban waterfront vision. The end goal, the developer informed me, was to build a high-end housing and commercial complex here in time 'to catch the 2017 market'.[1]

The news of the clearance had come out of the blue and with only a couple of days to spare, I rallied together volunteers from the Galgael Trust - a boat-building, skill-sharing social enterprise based in Govan - to help me to prepare for an on-site eulogy. Fifteen volunteers came down to the Graving Docks the next day and together we built a coracle using the site's new-growth willow. We took it in turns to forage, to make willow ties with shredded bark, and to weave the vessel into shape. Various floating strategies were tried and tested: the watertight skin made of Birch bark turned out to be all too time-consuming; airtight plastic bags full of reclaimed beer cans worked, but they weren't quite the effect we were after. Then Galgael's team leader

Tam appeared with a battered life ring that he had found washed up on the western promontory of the site. We roped it to the bottom of our vessel and it floated on the first test. On the eve of the clearance, a sombre congregation gathered around this promontory and watched as the ritual began. I gave my address while filling the vessel with kindling of Buddleja heads, dried fern fronds, and dead wood, collected in buckets at my feet. Galgael volunteer Jock helped me to carry the vessel down to the water's edge. The kindling was lit and the coracle released on a turning tide. This evening marked the end of the Graving Docks as I'd known it.

Ruination and resources of hope

On this evening in early Spring – though perhaps not for much longer – Govan Graving Docks was the last 'unresolved' industrial relic on Glasgow's River Clyde. At a time of rapid deindustrialisation in the late 80s, when the city's world famous shipping and manufacturing industries were closing by the day, hopes were pinned on the resurrection of the river-based economy. Glasgow's enduring 'economic asset', the River Clyde, was to become the beating heart of a new 'visitor economy', and so began a massive regeneration effort to transform its 'blighted' landscape into an attractive visitor destination.[2] The busy arrangement of docks and quays that branched off the river into the urban fabric were filled in and built over with Glasgow's new iconic 'starchitecture': dazzling metallic domes and towers of glass, the latest entertainment arenas, exhibition spaces, media centres and commercial complexes (Murphy and Bruno 2013, 5). The regeneration strategy led by the strategic growth coalition Clyde Waterfront implemented projects that were 'largely market driven with the public sector taking a planning role' (Pacione 2009, 154), and the effect of this approach on the ecological and public life of the Clyde has been clear to see in recent years. Today,

river access is fragmented by venue car parks and the privatised river edges of exclusive hotels and apartments. The new destination architecture of the Clyde prefers to value the river for its surface aesthetics, and so connections with the river take place indoors mainly, by curated views – the river itself always mediated by a frame and experienced as distance. As a result, the Clyde's tidal rhythms and freshwater flows, the aquatic ecologies and channel topographies, and the water birds and migrating fish of this elemental river are increasingly unfamiliar, and so too the sense of what might be at stake when it comes to matters bad practice. Specialist divers working the Clyde have found 'mountains of fridges' rising from the river bed oozing oils and bubbling gases at prime fly tipping spots.[3] Untreated sewage is directed straight into the river during times of peak rainfall when Glasgow's sewage works are strained beyond capacity.[4] In the Summer of 2014, hundreds of dead salmon floated through the city during the Commonwealth Games because of the river's overheated and deoxygenated waters.[5]

Govan Graving Docks mattered to me and many others because other forms of engagement with the River Clyde and so other ways of knowing it were possible here. In its rewilded ruins, there were important resources for thinking critically and creatively about the future of Glasgow's river-city relationship, and this was the promise that held me here. Reclamation presented an important challenge to the Clyde's human-centred imaginary. In layers of toxicity, the troubling scars of industry and associated memory, there were opportunities for thinking critically about the material legacies of industrial disturbance on the Clyde, and how future engagements might learn from them. And there were 'resources of hope' to be found in this Anthropocenic landscape, in its recombinant natures and contaminated cultures (Cameron 2013). Unfamiliar alliances had created shared possibilities for both the

human and the nonhuman on Govan Graving Docks. Human-disturbance was too complicated to condemn (Tsing, Lien and Swanson 2014).

But this window for critical reflection was fast closing over, and news of the clearance brought many more pressing matters into focus. Expressions of life and vitality, a cultural landscape, and enduring bonds were all at stake here. I had been searching for resources to picture a more resilient river-city relationship, and it had landed me in the midst of violent change. What could I do for the docks now? This question resounded throughout the year that I spent on the docks, and it called for a new commitment on my part. In this end-of-life, end-of-refuge situation (Haraway 2015), there was still scope to stage salvage operations, and at the very least, to think about appropriate practices of care and acknowledgement in the final days ahead. Action plans and strategies were out of the question – the developer had the schedule, and I would be witness to its unfolding. What kind of commitment then would these conditions of uncertainty allow? In Zylinska's words (2014), the threatened lifeways and vital matter of the site had issued an 'ethical call' (16). I responded with an ethical commitment that was both pragmatic in the circumstances, and open to creative possibilities: 'to work out possibilities for making better differences' on the ground (Zylinska 2014, 21).

Minimal ethics

The subject of this article is the emergent repertoire of urgent, public-facing research practices that I staged on this landscape in the year between Autumn 2013 and Autumn 2014. I return to this year in the field to consider what it means to do research on a fated landscape.[6] The article takes as its focus the methodological questions and

concerns that are raised by the fated landscape, and considers tactics for sustaining research in such volatile settings, and why this might be at all important. Four questions in particular are explored here. What kinds of engagement are necessary to understand the specificity of the fated landscape, and all that is at stake, and how might this knowledge be put to work in order to make a meaningful difference on the ground? What forms might this 'meaningful difference' take, and what kinds of methodological resources are available to the researcher on the fated landscape in order to understand the implications of 'certain fates', and the possibility for intervention? What sorts of ethical commitment can sustain research amidst volatility? And finally, what is the value of the working on a fated site; what sorts of meaningful legacies can it generate, both for the site itself, its associated communities, and for the researcher caught in the fray?

This repertoire of emergent practices found an ally in Zylinska's (2014) 'minimal ethics' for the Anthropocene. With the continuation of life on earth under threat, Zylinska (2015) has described the Anthropocene as an 'ethical pointer' - the term indicating 'a designation of the human obligation towards the geo- and biosphere' (181). The vitalist ethics that she has devised in response is post-human in the feminist sense: it asks humanity to become perceptive to the 'tangled mesh of everyday connections and relations' from which the human emerges (and hence the falsity of human supremacy) (Zylinska 2014, 17), while at the same time remaining attentive to the capacities that distinguish this 'human' (and which are its source of promise as an ethical agent), namely the capacity for self-reflexivity in moments of worldly engagement (Colebrook). Zylinska (2014) writes 'humans are not the only or even the most important actors that are making ... a difference' on this earth, 'but we are perhaps uniquely placed to turn the making of such difference into an ethical task' (21).

Zylinska's ethics had traction on Govan Graving Docks for three important reasons. First, as the term '*minimal* ethics' suggests, it is a 'mode of philosophical production [that] is necessarily fragmented: it gives up on any desire to forge systems, ontologies or worlds and makes itself content with minor interventions into material and conceptual unfoldings' (Zylinska 2015, 180). It was possible to practice minimal ethics on the Graving Docks without predefined aims, which was necessary on a shifting landscape, where opportunities for action were coming into and out of focus unexpectedly, and my own ways of seeing were re-configuring with changed circumstances. Second, minimal ethics proceeds by a mode of working that Zylinska (2014) describes as a 'post-masculinist rationality', which exchanges the typical distance of rationality for immersion, from where it is possible to 'respond to the call of matter and to its various materializations (15). The values underpinning the clearance works that were planned for the Graving Docks, had been settled in a city boardroom amongst real estate agents and businessmen, but 'minimal ethics' promised a radically different engagement, namely the possibility of making ethical moments *with* a fated landscape. Third, minimal ethics is described as 'a critical mobilization of the creative principle of life in order to facilitate a good life' (Zylinska 2014, 141). Zylinska's ethics made it possible to think about being more than a passive witness during the difficult months ahead, and how courage, and a readiness of manner could be put to work in the 'co-authoring' of hopeful legacies on Govan Graving Docks (Last 2013).

Minimal ethics proceeds by the method of critical vitalism. Zylinska (2015) writes that an immersed practitioner undertakes a 'physicalist engagement with the matter of life, with its particles and unfoldings', in order to become attuned to the difference that 'difference' makes, from within life (180). This facilitates the perception of a number vitalist realities. The first is that there are 'temporary stabilizations' in the

ongoing unfolding of the world, otherwise known as '*cuts made to the flow of life*', that 'occur both at the level of matter and (human) mind' (Zylinska 2014, 39). The second is that a tension exists 'between movement as an enabling force of becoming', and 'stoppage as an inevitable alteration in the rhythm of life' (Zylinska 2015, 181). The cut that a human makes, whether materially or rhetorically (such as dividing the world up into categories), distinguishes entities from the processual world. By this process, humans have become a differential force, 'making a difference to the arrangements of 'the world', to its unfolding and speed' – and in this same differential movement, 'human singularity' – which is not to be confused with human supremacy – manifests itself' (Zylinska 2015, 181). The cut is always violent in the sense that it can change the course of life's unfolding, but it is also both *necessary* to being, and a possible source of critical thought. As such, it is 'both an ontological cut and an ethical device' – it 'helps us grasp the world and respond to it, while at the same time moving in it and being moved by it' (Zylinska 2014, 42). Zylinska (2014) writes that the imperative of minimal ethics is ultimately 'to cut well into life, to make good things with it' (119). Sensitive to the violence that is inherent to material and conceptual differentiation (and to the processes of co-emergence and co-dependency that they enable), minimal ethics works out the 'possibilities for making... *better* differences across various scales' in order to minimise this violence (Zylinska 2015, 181). In short, minimal ethics is one 'that *makes sense* - and that *senses its own making*' (Zylinska 2014, 180).

In the writing that follows, I describe the practices that I staged on Govan Graving Docks in order to understand precisely what was at stake and to make small but 'better differences' on the ground as this period of local environmental change unfolded. I explain how these practices were devised (via ethical commitments, theoretical influences and the very real demands of the site), and most importantly, I

consider their legacy - specifically, what 'better differences' various efforts in surveying, salvaging and witnessing made on Govan Graving Docks, despite the uncertainties that this landscape continued to face. These methods for a fated landscape shared much in common; they were opportunist and affirmative, dogged, urgent and public-facing, lived (unrehearsed) and not applied. But in their motivation, tone and choreography, each method remained specific to the 'stubborn particularity' of site in its changing circumstances (Cruikshanks 1997: 61). Making methods with this landscape, rather than importing a toolkit of pre-existing methods, was the only way to make a small but no less meaningful difference on the ground. In the writing that follows, I build a case for this tailored way of working when it comes to engaging with matters of dispossession, extinction and environmental change in GeoHumanities research, given the resources that it can unearth for extending hopeful legacies from seemingly hopeless situations. I argue for the capacities of attentiveness, responsiveness, and creativity, which this way of working demands, and more specifically, the capacity to adapt to shifting roles, so that research remains relevant and vital. Images set within the text illustrate the agencies that were at stake on Govan Graving Docks as the writing uncovers them. Post-clearance, they are charged with another capacity, serving as small mementoes to this lost world.

Melancholy archivism

A Hobo spider (*Tegenaria agrestis*) had made its nest on a fallen concrete coping stone in open grassland where the Graving Docks' workshops once stood (Figure 1). There were two eggs inside attached with silk to the nest's assembly of twigs, moss, small stones, and earth. Native to Western Europe, the Hobo spider was first recorded

in Britain on Wilverley plain, Hampshire, in 1949 - in light of the frequent recordings that trace the country's railway lines, it is thought that this is how the Hobo spider has travelled. *Agrestis* is Latin for field: this species prefers rough grassland where it can find small rocks to serve as suitable web anchor anchors. Today, the Hobo spider is referred to more specifically as the 'brownfield site specialist' by entomologists studying their response to otherwise diminishing habitat.[7] The Graving Docks was the ideal urban meadow: a landscape scarred variously by human activity that had given rise to a mosaic of low-growing habitat - species rich grassland, bare ground, and early successional habitat – host to a diversity of invertebrate species. Many invertebrates have complex life-cycles, needing different things at different stages, and so this made the Graving Docks' patchwork of habitats particularly attractive. Within the patches there was diversity too – on thin, dry soils, thirsty plants had to put more effort into flowering to ensure that they could set seed to survive another year, and fast growing plants couldn't grab the nutrients they needed to dominate, making it possible for many species to flourish. At the time of recording, the Hobo spider on the fallen coping stone was the 6th of its kind to be identified in Scotland.

The developer announced that the site would be razed just as Summer was turning to Autumn. There was nothing of value here, we were told: no Tree Preservation Orders, and only parasitic weeds that were inflicting damage on this landscape's inventory of category A listed structures. There were ideals of 'Nature' at work in the developer's boardroom and on balance sheets that had overshadowed multiplicity and difference on Govan Graving Docks. Thirty years since the facility's closure, a fragmented and discordant world had superseded the order that had come before. In the ruins of industry, a version of 'recombinant nature' was enacted by a mix of nonhuman and human agencies, drawn together in violence/affinity/symbioses as

an uncertain future called (Hinchliffe 2007). This nature was a thing of contradiction - where wreckage and recovery, extinction and survival, loss and discovery, endings and beginnings, adaption and pollution kept a troubled sort of company (Tsing, Lien and Swanson 2014) (Figure 2). This nature revealed its strata: the complicated material inheritances of the past, and the new histories that had built on them. It was also rich with resources of hope (Cameron 2013). The affirmations that could be found in the entanglements of human and natural (evident in small stories like that of the Hobo spider), indicated that important possibilities still held in this human-disturbed nature (Tsing, Lien and Swanson 2014). These possibilities were life-giving, and also thought provoking, revealing the 'complex cross-weaves of vulnerability and culpability that exist between us and other species' (Macfarlane 2016). In short, far from a 'relict ecology or a restored ecology', the 'times and spaces' of nature on Govan Graving Docks were 'quite different from the *representative* ecologies that often aim to mimic a distant memory' (Hinchliffe et al 2005, 134). Here, 'nature [was] being practiced anew' (Hinchliffe 2007, 3). And yet, this particular version was met with indifference - its complexity overlooked. It wasn't pure or established. It was untidy and out of place (Figure 3). These value markers obscured patterns and processes of life and vitality on the Graving Docks, and ultimately sealed their fate.

When the news of the clearance broke, I considered what it might mean to 'become specialist' in this particular example of human-disturbed nature, and to use this knowledge to accurately document what would be lost. The Hobo spider knew this landscape intimately by its affordances – it knew it by the relics that would serve as web anchors, and by the species rich grasslands that were its source of food and raw material. In this perspective, it was possible to see beyond those categories that had rendered this dockland nature 'untrue'. I invited a range of experts and enthusiasts to

help me to carry out a ‘BioBlitz’ on Govan Graving Docks – an event described by the National Geographic as one ‘that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time’.[8] Neither exclusively urban nor natural, this ruin was a ‘disciplinary in-between space’, and so ours was multidisciplinary party (Tsing, Lien and Swanson 2014, 8). Ecologists, community workers, historians, botanists, geographers, artists, archaeologists and local residents came together in a spirit of urgent purpose, and with a broad range of field skills and interests between us, we were able to shed new light on a precarious urban wilderness, its associated communities, and the multiple expressions of value that existed therein. On a bright September morning, with magnifying lenses, plant identification books, vasculums (freezer bags), scissors, and sample pots for invertebrate in hand, we set out to create a biological inventory of this rewilded landscape. We conducted the BioBlitz in smaller groups, with each focused on a particular study area of the site, and then later reconvened around cuttings and inventories of feral species to discuss their complex life histories and capacities - habitable, edible, remedial, medicinal, thought-provoking, life-giving - and discussed the alliances and dependencies that had made life possible here. Not quite a ‘banners and bodies’ approach, but these quiet moments of sociality and knowledge building were our small acts of resistance. After the BioBlitz, participants each contributed a photograph of their most compelling find. The images of fungi, moss, snails, wild orchids, clover, resourceful ferns, the Hobo spider’s nest, and much more were printed as a postcard series. When the change came to Govan Graving Docks, these records of melancholy archivism would offer what Sinclair (2012) describes as a ‘proper accounting of loss’. Without them, ‘no record [will have] been left behind of our shame

in failing to resist. And no memorial... to the processes of weather, the complex entanglements of predatory humans and indifferent nature (8).

Building alliances (to build resiliencies)

I met Jimmy walking his dogs on the Graving Docks, and he told me about his life's work painting the ships that docked at this maintenance facility with red lead, chrome and bitumen. He was the last of 'a dying breed', he told me – the toxins had taken their toll on most of his colleagues. In Maria Fusco's words (2015), the still-living were 'walking monuments', their veins coursing with the residues of those ships that brought Glasgow fame and fortune.[9] In the Autumn, when we were witness to a riot of colour and upsurge of fungi, Jimmy said to me, 'just wait 'til you see they red flowers in Summer - you would'nae have imagined that a place like this could recover'. These flowers were the wild orchids (Epipactis helleborine), and they grew here before the clearance began (Figure 4). They grew on a dusting of soil on the cobbled bays around the basins, their spindly fragile stems reaching as high as the knee – 'unbelievable' in such mean conditions, Jimmy said, but they had a strategy – spreading out their roots like a carpet over the cobbles to tap into resources (with their tap root) between cobble joints. And these roots had some help too. The threads of Mycorrhizal fungi entered the roots to draw sustenance in the form of photosynthesised carbohydrate, while at the same time bringing the orchids water, and making minerals from the surrounding soil and rocks available to its host (Tsing 2012). On Govan Graving Docks, for a fleeting chapter, there were important alliances to be found within the mess of human disturbance.

The relationships that residents of Govan shared with Govan Graving Docks hung in the balance when news of the clearance emerged. When the facility had been in operation, most men in East Govan and many women were employed here in a variety of trades. There were shipwrights, blacksmiths, ‘red leaders’, ‘panel beaters’, electricians, ‘lead shotters’ and ‘tankies’ (a group of men responsible for cleaning out the inside of the ship’s diesel, oil and sewage tanks). In its thirty years of dereliction and rewilding, as the tides and watery publics of the Clyde infiltrated the concrete caissons, and ruderals found a foothold on industrial soil, the landowner-developer erected fences around the site but this did not dissuade those locals that could see an opportunity beyond the boundary line: the photographers, pigeon fliers, dog walkers, fire-builders, fishermen, den-builders, bird watchers, urban explorers, courters, walkers and amateur historians. Former workers and regular visitors like Jimmy had established small but important alliances with this rewilded ruin, where memories of a difficult, sometimes violent past had been transformed through nature’s unlikely reclamation. Even in its ruination, this was an important cultural landscape which communities of Govan helped to shape, whilst simultaneously being shaped by it. Conversations with the Graving Docks’ regulars revealed that this post-industrial landscape was still embedded in local memory, desires for the future, local knowledges and place-based identities. This was cultural landscape with real affects.

I took my research to neighbouring Govan with a plan to instigate a process of story sharing in the town’s public spaces. These stories would become important resources in thinking through the formative community connections that stood to be lost with the clearance and subsequent redevelopment. Pearson (2006) has advocated the use of stories to study the way in which landscape and local identity are intimately entwined. Pearson (2006) writes that ‘just as landscapes are constructed

out of the imbricated actions and experiences of people, so people are constructed in and dispersed through their habituated landscape: each individual, significantly, has a particular set of possibilities in presenting an account of their own landscape: stories (12). I gathered these stories of connection by distributing the BioBlitz postcards outside Govan Underground station with the help of a borrowed prop; a moving market stall. As people browsed the postcards, a small window for conversation was opened. I shared the news about the clearance and likely redevelopment (few knew of the plans that were afoot), and talked about the time that I had spent on Govan Graving Docks. Locals described their own personal connections with this landscape, and the postcards were important prompts in this regard, evoking personal memory and provoking new lines of thought – 'gosh you wouldn't have thought that there was such beauty there!' Local people tied the photographic images to very specific stories (about nature, childhood, heritage, memory, local identity and urban/community aspirations); stories that 'held together a vast body of information: histories, geographies, genealogies' (Pearson 2006, 25). These stories shed light on how biographies had become entwined with this landscape, how people had shaped and been shaped by it, what kinds of relations that had given rise to, and how these relations continued to inform sentiments of care, curiosity and ownership today.

The stories offered by former labourers unearthed some important connections. Unemployment and the precariousness of life that the demise of this local industry had brought were persistent social conditions in the local area. The losses were undeniable but the Graving Docks' reclamation had also seeded new resiliencies. Following years of gruelling labour (cleaning ships' diesel, sewage and oil tanks from the inside-out, knee deep in the swill of the drained dock, hauling materials and machinery, breathing the already smoke-choked air of the Clyde) former labourers that I spoke with, Jimmy

included, described the reclamation as ‘miraculous’. They described how rewilding had tended in small but significant ways to the trauma that lay sedimented beneath (Figure 5). Here it was possible to ‘enter another world’, as Jimmy observed. A place for simple pleasures: feeding birds, tracking foxes and walking the dogs. Their stories spanned industrial pasts to the present day, revealing how landscape and memory and local identity had emerged together through the reclamation. A real bond was evidenced by this ‘ecology of memory’ (DeSilvey 2006, 336). As stories were shared at the postcard cart, new connections were drawn between images, memory and hopes for the future. Local sentiment was bolstered, and alliances reaffirmed at a time when the meaning of this landscape was fast closing over. The acknowledgement that each story received at the busy postcard cart made them matter all the more.

Cultivating off-shoots

At the postcard cart, a former shipwright recalled a time when the rhythms of industry were part of daily life. ‘The first horn went [in Govan] at 6am - every morning, to get you up. Every day it was. It went in the evening again and the wives knew to get the potatoes on. Right on cue, there were the same crowds, brown overalls, and caps’. The movements of men, water, materials and waste across the dock, followed the strict prompts of bells, scheduled programs of work, and timetables, in a ‘production process dominated by future-orientated projects and targets’ (Edensor 2005, 125). With the abandonment of the docks however, the temporalities of ruination took hold – the biological time of lichens for example, the slow action of entropy, and material memory that scattered and transformed (Figure 6). The seasons found their expression on the docks. In the Summer, exotic adventives burst into flower - the Graving Docks’ thin, dry soils urging them to put all their efforts into flowering to ensure

that they can set seed to survive another year. In the Autumn, showy purple Buddleja panicles turned brown and brittle on the altar steps to disperse their seeds on the wind. Fronds of Dryopteris sprouting in the derelict Pump House like Victorian ornaments yellowed and decayed to rest their photosynthesising faculties when resources were low, making do instead with the food they stored in Summer. Life on the Graving Docks was witnessed in these seasons as 'a movement' – a movement of 'fundamental becoming' that was an 'active response to time's provocation to endure' (Grosz 2005, 37).

I had worked in the field by the arc of a year, from Autumn 2013, to Autumn the following year, and by the hours of light that a day brought, and the diurnal rhythms of the tide in the chamber basins. It was this seasonal immersion that enabled me to explore important expressions of life and vibrancy in this ruin, but the clearance works changed all of this. An all-too-human temporality clashed with the temporalities of the landscape and warped the arc of the year with bewildering indifference. It was in the 'Autumn of plenty', as it became known to me - the Autumn of Inkcaps, Puffballs, camaraderie and den building - that the landowner announced the Graving Docks' fate (Figure 7). In Spring the petrol chainsaws arrived. The wildflowers that were pushing up did so between fallen budding canopies. By Summer it was bare. The silence of that Summer, emptied of birds and rustling leaves, spoke volumes through its unseasonality (Kanngieser 2015, 2). The seasons became an important device through which to think about the play of human drama across the site. They became a reference point as I sought out expressions of time on Govan Graving Docks, especially in the lived experience of their incremental erasure.

Zylinska (2014) writes that 'life typically becomes an object of reflection when it is seen to be under threat' (9). In late December 2013, I thought about the untimely

end that life would face in Spring. This pressing mortality inspired a plan to siphon life out of the Graving Docks. This life-line would take the form of a haphazard experiment in urban cultivation. My colleague Erin Despard and I made plans to uproot what ferns we could from the Graving Docks and to transport them to another site in the city. This transplanting effort established a vital link between this site, faced with imminent dismantlement in the interests of developer-led urban regeneration, and the recipient, North Kelvin Meadow, a much valued community urban wild space that has had to prove its 'worth' in the face of a similar future.[10] The donation of plants would entwine the biographies of these two precarious urban ecologies, so that an ending in one marked a beginning in the other.

Winter was the best time to carry this work out, when dormant roots would be numbed to the shock. It was a freezing early morning when we locked our bikes to the Graving Docks security fence and ventured through the opening with our tools. The ferns we chose had to be mature with an established root system, but young enough that they would still have some vigour to take to new soil. Patience and a dexterous hand was needed to unearth the majority of the plant's root system; to feel around in substrate of thin soil and beer cans, to trace the adventurous pathways of their roots through and between metal and stone, and to finally tease them from the cracks in the cobbles and from each other (Figure 8). Finally we potted them – a terrible domestication – strapped them to the back of our bikes, and cycled through the city to North Kelvin Meadow. Staging these transitions in the best way that our tools and knowledge allowed was vital to ensure that the chances of survival didn't diminish as we went. And our work was not finished when these plants were safely in new soil. We had to tend to them through the Winter and the Spring, pruning any dead leaves to focus the plant's energies on its re cooperating root system. New growth, that's what

we were looking for. There was still opportunity to anchor ourselves in the arc of the year, to make a better difference on the ground. By taking cues from the opportunism of life on Govan Graving Docks, we too sought out the cracks in the urban fabric and made them generative (Figure 9).

Witnessing dis-mantlement

Before the Graving Docks' green mantle was removed, I found an unusual plant growing on the sunny leeward side of a rubble pile. It was quite remarkable; 30cm tall, a single unusually thick stem, succulent leaves and whorls of creamy green flowers. I wondered how it was surviving on these rocks. Was survival the right word though? This was a resplendent exhibition. I took a hurried field recording with my camera which I planned to send to BioBlitz participant Angus Hannah, committee member of the Botanical Society for Britain and Ireland (BSBI) in Scotland. On the first day of the clearance I struggled to understand how to witness the changes that were unfolding and soon returned to the office defeated, to find that Angus had replied. He urged me to take a cutting of the flowers and leaves, press them and post them on to BSBI's Glasgow-based botanist Peter McPherson for identification - Angus suspected it might be a significant find. When I had left the difficult scenes behind me earlier that day, the men and their chainsaws had been moving westwards - it might already be too late. I darted back to my bike, and by the time I reached the docks the workmen had already gone home. I ducked through the fence and ran to the rubble pile under a dimming sky. Felled trees were splayed out around the base of the mound. Wood pigeons were making do, still perching on the fallen branches. I picked over the mess to the rubble but I could already see that the plant was gone. I searched amongst the debris. Surely it was tossed aside somewhere. I disciplined my eyes to see bright

apple green leaves, and when that didn't work I climbed to the top of the mound to do a broader survey. Just as I was scrambling up, two swans flew low overhead, their huge wings tearing through the air – an unlikely sight in inner Glasgow at the best of times, and even more poignant now. I slid back down the slope again to the plant's rooting place, picked over the remains with a keener eye, and found a small, withered, earthy brown stem not far from the root. I turned it around in my hands and could tell from the serrated leaves and the whorl of skeletal flowers still clinging to the stem that it was part of the same plant I was looking for. The dead branch was all that remained.

For days, the withered plant lay on my desk. One story of loss, and only a partial story at that. In its half decayed state, it seemed unlikely that any of the BSBI members would be able to identify it. Anonymous, namelessness, a talisman, and symbol of all the others. Then, Angus got in touch again with news. He had sent my shaky field recording to Douglas McKean, Scotland's 'Referee for Rare Aliens', and Mick Crawley, BSBI's most expert and enthusiastic recorder of British aliens (who was currently writing a definitive book on the subject). They were both in agreement; the missing plant was a Helleborus argutifolius, as Angus had originally suspected, a Corsican wildflower. This plant, more used to the rocky terrain of the Mediterranean, had found a home from home on the Graving Docks demolished workshops. There were very few records of it growing wild in Scotland: Mick was keen to know the OS grid reference of the plant's rooting place so that he could put it into his new book. The find was important to those botanists enrolled in its identification. The migration routes, changing ecologies and climates, and the adaptive mechanisms that its survival hinted at were still unfamiliar. It was a true artist this Helleborus.

The concern and unrelenting sense of imagined possibility that already had me deeply invested in Govan Graving Docks grew stronger when the way ahead was

difficult and uncertain. I had been native to this landscape for three seasons, getting wrapped up in the lives of its inhabitants and feeling in some small way that I belonged (Gibson-Graham). The clearance had put my own personal connection with this landscape in jeopardy, and although this was only one small story, it mattered because it illustrated what stood to be lost for an individual who felt a part of it; the kinds of engagement, the relationships and the possible futures that were at stake (Figure 10). When the clearance began, I was faced with the question of how to study and engage with the change as it unfolded. Important directives to thinking were found in Eyal Weizman's (2012a) proposition for 'forensic architecture' - a practice developed in human rights research in the wake of the material turn. Forensic architecture expands the idea of what constitutes a 'subject' by studying *all* material agents that are marked/affected by an event. In a turn away from the human testimonial, forensic architecture investigates violations by 'evidencing force fields from forms', first by the study of irregular 'singularities', and then by the repetition of these moments, which enables processes of dispossession and displacement for example to be inferred (2012b). Itemising bodies, materials and their transformation, making inventories of loss and descriptions of scenes of destruction on Govan Graving Docks gave a 'voice' to the more-than-human during the clearance, which was an important task, but there was also a place for testimony in my approach. My relations with the site were such that I also endured the change. There was evidence of self-transformation, a kind of becoming-with-destruction, in the sense that new commitments, ethics and aspirations took shape and were carried into subsequent stages of the research (Taussig 2011). It was just as important to think in terms of these legacies, as well as the processes that were underway. I kept a diary of the clearance period, which included a forensics of dis-mantlement and personal reflection on the difficult scenes that were witnessed.

The mode of feminist materialist witnessing that was developed across its pages gave texture and specificity to an instance of urban change, and mapped the lines of becoming that would have resonance long after the workmen had gone home, in ways that a ‘before and after’ photo never could.

Monday 21st April

This morning a bright orange petrol guzzling chipper arrived, and two men dressed in orange boiler suits. The machine stood next to the Pump House and the men fed it branches from the nearest stockpile. They went in through a gaping funnel and then the matter was ejected from a spout at the other end, making perfect silver arcs against the river.

I stood at the Pump House wall, mesmerised by these lines that began with furious energy before being overcome by the thickness of air. A pile of particulate matter built up on the other side. The spout of the chipper was turned in the direction of a thin wind which helped to manage the discharge. The operators were from a waste disposal business and they were well shielded. Their faces were screened with face guards, ear defenders clapped over their ears, and hands were protected inside thick black leather gloves. Their glasses were dark. I watched the bright white furry catkins shower over the cobbles beneath the greedy funnel. The blades rattled at an unbearable pitch as they ripped through the felled trees, the toughness of maturity lost to the sharpness of a blade. The air was thick with petrol. Once

they'd fed the machine with their stockpile, they went to the bays for more. It was repetitive work. Gather, stockpile, shred, and so it went it on.

I hung back, and asked for permission to take some photographs when there was a brief pause in proceedings. The petrol canister was removed and the operators headed back up to their van on the road to re fill. The woodchip piles had reached such a height that they had spilt down the retaining wall on to the cobbled bay below. I jumped down to this lower level and scooped up a handful of wood grains. They were colourless and indistinguishable. Everything does turn to dust, but this was a violent undoing.

Wednesday 23rd April

I returned to the Graving Docks today, expecting an eerie silence. Instead there was a bigger machine, a big yellow digger this time, its pneumatic arms holding a solid trough with pointed teeth. The digger ploughed up and down Bay Two following the line of the rusty crane tracks. I stood at the brink of the altar steps in the middle of the bay and watched as its teeth scoured the surface of the cobbles. Moss, grasses, ferns and disembodied roots were lifted into the trough as the digger moved forwards. A trail of bare granite and strewn soil extended behind it. The digger carried its load to a towering dump at the western end of the bay. I walked out on to the bay to take a closer look. Peeking from the joints in the rusted metal crane tracks there were a few lone dandelions tilting in the fresh Spring wind.

I returned to the water gates to get out of the way where I was joined by husband and wife photographers loaded up with tripods and camera cases who were here to take pictures of the Graving Docks' ruined structures. They had a particular enthusiasm for rust, they told me. The driver climbed out of the digger and walked up to the watergates. 'A tidy up' he said. 'It's a big job' the woman remarked. The driver nodded, looking over the bays with a furrowed brow. 'What's going to happen after the clear-up?' she asked. The driver shrugged. 'I'm only an operator - I do what I'm told'. There was only progress left to talk about now, and so I did. 'How much longer until you're finished then?' I asked. He looked out over the bays again, and measured it up. 'I'll be gone by the end of tomorrow' he said. I left this party on the water gates and walked over to the waste piles rising up from the ground like earth moulded tumuli. It was a monstrous island - a heap of matter thoroughly chewed up and spat out. There were moss clumps, loose earth and bewildered roots. Stray branches strained out of the mass like distressed limbs, and woodchip dusted the top.

Crafting methods on the fated landscape

As the local dispossessions, extinctions and alienations wrought by the Anthropocene become an increasingly tangible part of daily life, Zylinska's minimal ethics poses an important challenge. How can 'better differences' on the ground, better 'cuts to the flow of life' be made through engaged research of fated ecological futures? This account of practice on Govan Graving Docks has identified a number of methodological demands specific to the fated landscape that need to be considered with this aim in mind. The timing of research must keep pace with change, the

researcher must be ready to take on different roles to meet the necessities of changing circumstances, and lastly, research frameworks predetermined in advance must be exchanged for something far more scrambled and emergent, with interpretation happening along the way so that doing can lead to more doing. In terms of the methodological resources that can be drawn on to sustain this sort of research, the specificity of place, its stories of resilience and opportunism, local sentiment and the researcher's own personal entanglement are just some examples.

Zylinska (2014) writes that in the practice of minimal ethics, a practical kind of philosophising takes place; 'one that borrows from artistic sensibilities and that produces ideas with things and events rather than *just* with words' (14). The ethics that I developed on Govan Graving Docks took the form of a creative pragmatics: an approach that can best described as one part craft and one part graft. The craft was to be found in the ways that research methods were devised with the site, so that they became a measure of site responsiveness and self-reflexivity. The graft was there in the spadework, the strain and the long days it took to realise these approaches, not to mention the task of 'keeping...balance amid surprises' (Solnit 2006: 5). Both creative responsiveness and a need for efficacy were essential on this particular site, where research problematics were substantial and very real: inspirations had to be translated into messy processes and pure ideas quickly entered into the fray of noisy conversation. This account of craft and graft on Govan Graving Docks describes what it takes to devise action-based research practices in relation to local environmental change, what the potential of these methods are in terms of salvaging hopeful legacies, and why this undertaking matters. By becoming the melancholic archivist, the landscape activist, and meticulous witness, by keeping pace with the change, by enduring ruptures and uncertainty, I was able to bring about small changes.

Documents were made to lost ways of life, new life-lines were established, local sentiments were acknowledged and important commitments were made. They were small contributions in the circumstances but nevertheless, they would outlast the destruction.

NOTES

[1] At the time of writing, the developer's vision still awaits planning permission. On March 25th 2017 the developers exhibited their final proposals at the Riverside Hall for public comment, before an 'in principle' planning application was submitted to Glasgow City Council in April.

[2] Clyde Waterfront was a strategic growth coalition operating between 2003 and 2014, formed of the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, Glasgow City, Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire Councils. In a visioning document published in 2004, 'The Clyde Waterfront Regeneration Plan: A River Reborn', Clyde Waterfront outlined a development strategy to transform the River Clyde into a 'world class' centre for business and tourism, so that it might again become an 'economic powerhouse and an international symbol of success'. The plan can be found at http://www.clydewaterfront.com/ media/5527/clyde%20waterfront%20regeneration%20p lan.pdf

[3] On the 29th Dec 2003, the Herald Scotland reported that dangerous chemicals had been leaked into the river as a result of large-scale fly tipping in an online article entitled 'Mountains of Refrigerators Found Dumped in the Clyde'. See http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/1252420 2.Mountain_of_refrigerators_found_dumped_in_the_Clyde_Fears_over_danger_pos ed_by_chemicals/

[4] In Appendix 7 of a business plan published in 2014 entitled 'Improving the Water Environment', Scottish Water report that its sewage works have 'storm overflows

which discharge untreated combined waste and surface water to water bodies during periods of heavy rain – this prevents the sewer network from being overloaded and causing flooding'. See http://www.scottishwater.co.uk/assets/about%20us/files/strategic%20projections/appendix7improvingthewaterenvironment.pdf

[5] The Clyde River Foundation blog about the challenges faced by fish life in the River Clyde as a result of pollution. The fish kills of 2014 were reported in a post entitled 'River Clyde fish kill near Glasgow Green'. See http://www.clyderiverfoundation.org/river-clydefish-kill-near-glasgow-green/

[6] The term 'fated landscape' is used here to convey a sense of certain peril, a context in which intervention might seem 'pointless' and vastly diminished by other agencies (an idea that the term 'threatened landscape', for example, does not capture).

[7] Buglife, a UK organisation dedicated to the conservation of invertebrate, have written a detailed record on the characteristics of the Hobo Spider. See https://www.buglife.org.uk/bugs-and-habitats/hobo-spider

[8] National Geographic have undertaken extensive research on the values of BioBlitz research. See http://www.nationalgeographic.org/projects/bioblitz

[9] In a BBC Radio 4 documentary broadcast on 17 Oct 2015, entitled 'Open Art, Master Rock', Maria Fusco describes how she has woven together the geological, mythological and technological histories of a mountain Ben Cruachan in her experimental radio play 'Master Rock'. In 1959, the Tunnel Tigers from Donegal arrived to blast out Ben Cruachan to house a hydroelectric power station within the mountain. Maria Fusco describes these men as 'walking monuments' on account of the silicosis that many developed making the world's most renowned tunnels. This is a slow degenerative disease caused by tiny particles of dust that line the lungs.

[10] The fate of North Kelvin Meadow can be followed on their blog post. See https://northkelvinmeadow.com/

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. *The Hobo Spider's Nest.* Postcard image by Suzanne Burgess, 2013.

Figure 2. *The Rusty Screw and the Snail.* Postcard image by Svenja Meyerricks, 2013.

Figure 3. *A Sylvan Web.* Postcard image by Erin Despard, 2013.

Figure 4. *Dancing Orchids.* Postcard image by Emily Chappell, 2013.

Figure 5. *Miniature Forest.* Postcard image by Deborah Dixon, 2013.

Figure 6. *Mossy Island.* Postcard image by Hannah Brackston, 2013.

Figure 7. *Mushroom on Mossbed.* Postcard image by Sabina Hellman, 2013.

Figure 8. *Dockland Pioneer.* Postcard image by Hayden Foreman-Smith, 2013.

Figure 9. *Birch Break Through.* Postcard image by Clem Sandison, 2013.

Figure 10. *Casting Out.* Postcard image by Ruth Olden, 2013.